

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NSC-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10
NSAE-00 PA-01 ICA-11 SP-02 SSC-01 /045 W
-----049164 200335Z /70

R 182115Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3790
INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 3397

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV PA
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT STROESSNER'S SIXTH INAUGURATION: AUGUST 15, 1978

REF ASUNCION 3330

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT STROESSNER ASSUMED A SIXTH TERM AS PRESIDENT OF PARAGUAY ON AUGUST 15, 1978. ALL INAUGURAL EVENTS WERE CARRIED OUT WITH PRECISION. IN GENERAL, MILITARY OR CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENTS SENT HIGH-LEVEL DELEGATIONS WHILE THE WESTERN DEMOCRACIES WERE REPRESENTED BY AMBASSADORS ACCREDITED TO PARAGUAY. THERE WERE NO CHANGES IN THE CABINET DESPITE RAMPANT RUMORS OF IMPENDING DISMISALS. SOME OBSERVERS POINT TO THIS LACK OF CHANGE AS AN INDICATION OF THE ANACHRONISTIC NATURE OF THE STROESSNER GOVERNMENT. AN IMPRESSIVELY LARGE COLORADO PARTY PARADE AUGUST 14 WAS DEEMED AN INTERNAL POLITICAL EVENT BY THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY, THE U.S. AND SEVERAL LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES WHO WERE NOT REPRESENTED

IN THE DIPLOMATIC BOX. A GREAT NUMBER OF RECEPTIONS, WREATH-LAYINGS AND CREDENTIALS CEREMONIES WENT ON FOR THREE DAYS. AT EACH OF THESE EVENTS, RANKING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT, MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE GOP IS VERY ANXIOUS TO SEE AN IMPROVEMENT IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. END SUMMARY.

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2. PRESIDENT STROESSNER TOOK THE OATH OF OFFICE AS PRESIDENT OF PARAGUAY AT 8:10 AM ON AUGUST 15, 1978. THIS MARKS THE SIXTH TIME HE HAS BEEN SWORN IN SINCE HE CAME TO POWER THROUGH A MILITARY COUP IN 1954; HE HAS BEEN ELECTED TO OFFICE FIVE TIMES; THE NEW TERM WILL RUN UNTIL AUGUST 14, 1983. ALL INAUGURAL EVENTS WERE WELL-ORGANIZED.

3. IN GENERAL, COUNTRIES GOVERNED BY VERY CONSERVATIVE OR MILITARY REGIMES WERE REPRESENTED AT A HIGH LEVEL, E.G. SOUTH AFRICA BY FOREIGN MINISTER BOTHA, TAIWAN BY ITS CNO. THE U.S., THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND COUNTRIES RULED BY DEMOCRATIC REGIMES WERE GENERALLY REPRESENTED BY AMBASSADORS ACCREDITED TO PARAGUAY, SOME RESIDENT HERE, OTHERS IN BRASILIA, MONTEVIDEO AND BUENOS AIRES. THE VICE PRESIDENT OF BRAZIL WAS THE HIGHEST RANKING FOREIGN REPRESENTATIVE BUT HE WAS UPSTAGED BY THE LAST MINUTE APPEARANCE OF ARGENTINE JUNTA MEMBER ADMIRAL EMILIO MASSERA WHO CAME IN HIS "PERSONAL" CAPACITY AT THE INVITATION OF PRESIDENT STROESSNER. ARGENTINA, NICARAGUA, EL SALVADOR, HONDURAS AND SPAIN WERE REPRESENTED AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL.

4. AFTER THE PRESIDENT TOOK HIS OATH, HE SWORE IN HIS CABINET AT THE PALACIO LOPEZ. AS REPORTED REFTEL, NOT ONE CHANGE WAS MADE IN CABINET PERSONNEL DESPITE A CHORUS OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE VENALITY OR INCOMPETENCE OF VARIOUS MINISTERS AND A PLETHORA OF RUMORS THAT SOME WOULD GO. SOME OBSERVERS CLAIM THIS MERELY DEMONSTRATES THE ANACHRONISTIC AND SCLEROTIC NATURE OF THE STROESSNER GOVERNMENT. THE GREAT AGE OF MANY MINISTERS LED THE CARTOONIST FOR THE AFTERNOON PAPER "ULTIMA HORA" TO SUGGEST THAT THE CABINET WAS GOING TO TAKE THE OATH OF OFFICE AT THE LOCAL OLD FOLKS HOME. EVIDENTLY, PRESIDENT STROESSNER DECIDED HE FELT MORE COMFORTABLE WITH THE STATUS QUO, EITHER TO AVOID ROCKING THE BOAT OR BECAUSE

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HE DID NOT WANT TO APPEAR TO SUBMIT TO INTERNAL POLITICAL PRESSURES. THERE IS EVERY REASON TO BELIEVE HE IS AWARE OF THE SHORTCOMINGS OF HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES.

5. ONE OF THE MORE STRIKING INAUGURAL EVENTS WAS THE COLORADO PARTY PARADE ON AUGUST 14, BILLED AS A "CIVIC" EVENT BUT CLEARLY A HIGHLY STRUCTURED SHOW OF MASS SUPPORT FOR THE REGIME. MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND FLAG-WAVING MARCHERS, SOME BY CHOICE, OTHERS BY NECESSITY, PASSED THE PRESIDENT'S REVIEWING STAND FOR MORE THAN FIVE HOURS. THE RED COLORADO PARTY BANNERS AND IMPRESSIVE DISCIPLINE LOOKED MORE LIKE A LEFT RATHER THAN RIGHT-WING EXTRAVAGANZA. THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DECIDED NOT TO ATTEND AND WAS JOINED BY THE U.S. AND SUCH LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES AS COLOMBIA, VENEZUELA, PANAMA AND PERU. THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR WAS PUT UNDER CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE TO ATTEND BY THE INFLUENTIAL ITALIAN COMMUNITY HERE BUT HE INSISTED ON SEEKING INSTRUCTIONS FROM ROME WHICH NEVER CAME.

6. THROUGHOUT THE MANY EVENTS OF THE THREE-DAY CELEBRATION, THE OFFICIAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE UNITED STATES WARMED UP REMARKABLY. PRESIDENT STROESSNER MADE SEVERAL

FRIENDLY GESTURES TOWARD THE AMBASSADOR AND SENIOR OFFICIALS
OF THE GOP WENT OUT OF THEIR WAY TO REASSURE OTHER EMBASSY
OFFICIALS THAT PARAGUAY WANT TO RETAIN ITS GOOD RELATIONS
WITH THE U.S. THE MARKED CHANGE IN CLAIMTE HERE WILL BE
THE SUBJECT OF A SEPARATE TLEGRAM.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INAUGURATION, PRESIDENT ELECT, FORM OF GOVERNMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978ASUNCIO3397
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780340-0704
Format: TEL
From: ASUNCION
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780846/aaaablrj.tel
Line Count: 122
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 3541e360-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 ASUNCION 3330
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1686844
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENT STROESSNER'S SIXTH INAUGURATION: AUGUST 15, 1978
TAGS: PGOV, PA, (STROESSNER, ALFREDO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/3541e360-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014